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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted using six Utah communities to develop methods for the identification and surveying of community leaders in small, medium, and large Utah communities. Questions concerned the relationship between identified problems and community size, and the design and utilization of appropriate research instruments. Community problem check lists were developed for conducting face-to-face and telephone interviews. Results indicated that (1) the local telephone directory can serve as a primary source in the identification and selection of representative community leaders; (2) community problems are, to some extent, a function of community size; and (3) the face-to-face and telephone interviewing methods provided information of equal quality at all community levels. (CMV)

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ISSUES IN ASCERTAINING THE DIFFERENT NEEDS OF URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERS

NONTECHNICAL REPORT

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The purpose of this study was to develop methods for the identification and surveying of community leaders in small, medium and large communities. Questions concerning the relationship between identified problems and community size, and the design and utilization of appropriate research instruments were posed. Six communities within the coverage area of KUED-TV, Utah's statewide public television station were selected for study. The population centers represented one "large," two "medium" and three "small" communities. These six communities not only represented major population divisions, but a range of communities from less than 5,000 to over 150,000, thus providing for comparisons of survey methodologies within the small and medium divisions.

Drawing the Sample

Utilizing the FCC's "Community Leader Annual Checklist," a total of twenty categories were used to classify the organizations found in the current telephone directories of the six communities selected for this study. The leader of each organization was operationally defined as the chief executive officer, and was the first interview choice. When the designated leader was unavailable, the next highest level officer was selected. The "Other" category was used to provide a greater representation from various elements from within the community on a case by case basis. Generally speaking, the nineteen specified categories were found to be very satisfactory for the communities surveyed. The total sample consisted of one leader from each category for the small communities, two leaders from each for the medium communities, and three leaders from each for the large community for a total of 200.

The Research Instrument

The instrument designed for this study fit on a single 8-1/2 x 11 inch sheet of paper. By folding the paper in half along the eleven inch side, a four-page (5-1/2 x 8-1/2") test booklet was prepared. Page 1 contained all the information required by the FCC on their "Suggested Leader Contact Form" (except the problems identified by the respondent): date, name and address of person contacted, organization represented by respondent, leader checklist category represented, respondent's position in the organization, time and place of contact, interviewer's name, and method of contact. Page 2 contained an introductory set of instructions and the master problem checklist. Page 3 provided for an open-ended expansion of the top five problems cited by the respondent. Page 4 was blank except for the heading, "Additional Comments." Since a major objective of this project was to develop alternative survey methods for public broadcasters, two forms of the research instrument were developed; one for face-to-face interviews, and a second for telephone interviews. Both forms were identical except for the instructions and checklist format contained on Page 2.

Form A: Face-to-Face

The face-to-face instrument instructed the interviewee to select the five most important problem areas in his or her community. If there were problems in the community not represented by the list, the respondent was encouraged to identify additional problems in the "Other" category. Once the five most pressing problems were chosen, the interviewee was instructed to rank the problems in order of greatest importance, marking the most pressing problem number 1 and the fifth most important problem number 5. The selection of five as the number of problems to be cited was supported by preliminary experiences of the authors

gained while completing a pilot study in anticipation of the CPB ascertainment project. Having ranked the top five problems, the respondent would return the questionnaire to the interviewer, who would ask for an explanation of what the respondent meant by the topics selected. Additional statements which might contribute to the survey or assist in future interpretation of the data were recorded on Page 4. (Form A is presented in Appendix I.)

Form B: Telephone

Early attempts to utilize the face-to-face instrument for telephone interviews proved to be unsatisfactory. Without having the entire list of problems in front of the respondent, the telephone interviewees could not manage the fifteen item list. To correct this shortcoming, a set of seven scales was printed to the right of each item and instructions for using the scales were prepared. Using the ratings of 1 to 7, the interviewer could ask the respondent to prioritize the problems further. That is, by focusing the interviewee's attention on those items rated 7, the researcher would ask the respondent to rank them accordingly, with the most pressing problem receiving a ranking of 1. If less than five items received a rating of 7, the researcher would move to those items rated 6, and so on, until the respondent had identified what he considered to be the top five problem areas. The interviewer would then ask for an explanation of each problem, as was done in the face-to-face interviews.

In an attempt to check possible ordering effects inherent in Form A, the telephone format required that the researcher begin the list at a different point each time. In other words, the alphabetical listing of Form A was altered so that the same order did not reappear in fifteen successive telephone interviews. Every interview afforded an opportunity for the respondent to identify additional problems not adequately covered in the checklist. (Form B is presented in Appendix II.)

Results and Discussion

One of the objectives of this study was to determine if the problems identified by community leaders are a function of community size. Within the limitations of the present investigation, it would appear that community size is a definite contributor to the problems identified. There is a higher correlation among the problems generated at each community level than across the different sized communities. It should be noted, however, that there are problem categories which were of major importance to leaders from all three community levels. Problems associated with "Employment" and "Economic Issues" were reflected in the top five concerns of leaders in small, medium and large communities.

Perhaps of equal importance to the similarity or dissimilarity of broad problem categories identified by leaders from the three community levels is the finding that interpretations of the problems vary considerably from one community to another. This is true both within and across community levels. Hence, the problem categories greatly facilitate the grouping of data across the entire coverage area, but, at the same time, conceal meaningful differences which result in a problem summary that suggests greater homogeneity than actually exists. However, since station management will be coming into direct contact with community leaders, the specific interpretations which are unique to each community will be obvious to those individuals concerned with programming decisions based upon the ascertainment data. Keeping this in mind, the broad problem categories provide both a convenient and efficient technique for classifying community problems and for summarizing the problems in a form that is representative of the entire broadcast service area.

Although there is little question that the top problems identified in each community were representative of the same major concerns had the study been con-

ducted over a longer time period (thereby more closely approximating the required continuous ascertainment procedure), the agenda-setting function of the local media undoubtedly influenced the specific rankings reported in this study. This factor was especially true for the Salt Lake City (large community) survey. Just a few days before the research team was to begin the scheduled interviews, Congressman Allan Howe was arrested for soliciting sex acts from two female police decoys. This story, and subsequent developments, became a lead news item on the front page of both Salt Lake City dailies and the evening news broadcasts of the three commercial television stations. Respondents' open-ended interpretations of both "Religious and Moral Values" and "Government and Politics" suddenly included direct references to the Allan Howe case. The stability of both of these categories as on-going problem areas is supported by their appearance in the top listings of the open-ended survey and the research instrument pretest. However, one is tempted to speculate as the probable rankings of these two problem categories during a nonelection year when no media attention is given to the moral conduct of Senators and Congressmen.

The experience of using both face-to-face and telephone interviewing techniques (Forms A and B) clearly indicates that both methods can be used in different sized communities with equal effectiveness. The data derived from both instruments was not only similar in content, but comparable in quality and projected usefulness. Although the sample size used in the main portion of this study did not permit separate tabulations by research instrument, the top ranked problem was identical across Forms A and B in all communities where both face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted.

While there is no evidence to suggest that either method is superior at any given community level in terms of information quality, each method has its own

procedural advantages. For instance, the face-to-face method encourages the interviewer to meet with the community leader on his own territory, thus permitting on-location confirmation of the specific problems identified. The in-person visit is appreciated especially by leaders in small rural communities who feel their problems are not usually considered, and who have a genuine interest in informing representatives from the larger metropolitan areas. The face-to-face interview not only provides for additional information about the community, but about the interviewee. Nonverbal cues about the leader, his organization and his level of understanding can be acquired through the in-person interview. On-location visits also facilitate the identification of "invisible" leaders, by chance encounters and personal observations.

The major advantage of the telephone interview is that community leaders from across the broadcast service area can be contacted without the manager ever leaving the television station. If the station has access to a WATS line, the cost of telephone interviewing is minimal and it represents a considerable time saving over the face-to-face visits. Should the leader be busy at the time the telephone interview is initiated, the leaders can return the call at the mutual convenience of both manager and leader.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The local telephone directory can serve as a primary resource in the identification and selection of representative community leaders. The category system utilized in the yellow pages to list community agencies bears a striking resemblance to the categories contained in the FCC's "Community Leader Annual Checklist." Since the telephone directory is updated annually, it tends to be a more reliable source of information than do various directories of community service agencies or public offices, which are revised less frequently.

2. Broadcasters can supplement information gleaned from the telephone directory by asking the visible community leaders to identify other leaders who represent checklist categories for which no formal organizations were found. Using leaders to identify other leaders who, in turn, identify still other leaders is a "snowball technique" which proved to be extremely successful in the present study. Chance encounters with local residents also provide numerous opportunities to acquire "grass root" perceptions as to the identity of less visible community leaders. Informal minorities existing in small communities, such as ethnic groups and senior citizens, will frequently necessitate the utilization of the snowball technique as a means of locating representative spokesmen.

3. The identification of community "information networks" through use of this technique should prove beneficial in sustaining a continuous ascertainment effort throughout the license renewal period. Whereas large metropolitan areas afford a ready sample of leaders who fit all of the FCC's organizational categories, a broad spectrum of community leaders in small towns is much more difficult to find. Here, where a single individual may appear to represent three or more checklist categories, broadcasters must take advantage of every opportunity to extend their list of community leaders. The names of individuals who formerly held specific positions or served on ad hoc committees, etc., will be of considerable value in maintaining continuous community leader contacts.

4. Community problems are, to some extent, a function of community size. Broadcasters cannot expect to gain a clear impression of the problems in rural communities by restricting their leader survey to metropolitan areas. A high degree of similarity was found to exist across communities of comparable size, but the specific issues and perceptions associated with those problems varied greatly from one community to another. The findings of this study suggest that

a wise practice would be to group the different communities within a station's coverage area on the basis of size. These categories could then be used in the preparation of an interview schedule which would insure a representative sampling of leaders from each community level throughout the survey period.

5. The face-to-face and telephone interviewing methods provided information of equal quality at all community levels. Leaders expressed virtually no difficulty in using the "Community Problem Checklist," whether presented in person or over the telephone. The open-ended responses provided useful explanations of the general problem topics, and both methods afforded an opportunity for additional comments about the community or recommendations for station management. The "Other" category was used infrequently, and in no case was this additional information seen by the research team as falling outside the fifteen problem areas provided. However, to facilitate the successful completion of the interview, this information was always treated as an original category and discussed separately during the open-ended expansion of the five problem areas. Since the face-to-face and telephone methods provide comparable information, broadcasters can use each method to its best advantage. The face-to-face interview allows the interviewer to meet the leaders in person, and to gain an increased understanding of problem areas through personal observation. The telephone interview requires less time and effort, is generally less expensive, and can be easily scheduled into a manager's daily routine. Given the FCC's statement that the Commission will accept "a broad range of methods for leader interviews," it is recommended that a combination of the methods used in this study be employed throughout the survey period. In-person visits to the communities provide valuable information which makes later telephone interviews much more meaningful and easier to complete. While an even balance between face-to-face and telephone interviews

seems appropriate, a greater dependence upon telephone interviews should not reduce the quality of the leader survey, if the manager is sufficiently familiar with each of the communities represented.

6. The number of leaders needed to provide an adequate sampling for any given community is a function of the community's size, but exactly how many leaders should be surveyed in each case must be left to the best judgment of station management. There is an inverse relationship between community size and leader awareness of a broad spectrum of community issues. That is, as community size increases, community leaders tend to become more myopic and narrow in their perceptions of community problems. Broadcasters who rely on the same list of community leaders, especially in the larger communities, may exclude the identification of major problem areas, or at least minimize the number of alternative interpretations associated with major problem categories.

7. Since a major limitation in the use of a "Community Problem Checklist" is the possible omission of significant community problems, broadcasters must make every effort to insure that the checklist employed is representative of existing problems within the service area. The original instrument designed for use in this project was drawn from problem topics identified within the Salt Lake City metropolitan area during the summer of 1975. These categories were updated and refined on the basis of thirty open-ended telephone interviews. Should a broadcaster decide to utilize the research instruments developed for this study, it is strongly recommended that series of open-ended interviews be conducted to pretest the appropriateness of the problem categories for the service area in question. It should also be determined whether or not the sample issues listed with each problem topic should be rewritten, expanded or eliminated entirely. Although the sample issues used in this study apparently assisted community lead-

ers in the identification of problem areas, and hence provided a point of departure for the open-ended discussions, it is not known if the research instruments contributed to a systematic exclusion of other interpretations. It should also be remembered that the fifteen problem categories are not intended to be mutually exclusive. Quite to the contrary, different individuals may associate the same specific issue with different problem categories, but these fluctuations will tend to balance out, thus permitting the most important problems to be revealed.

8. Since the FCC permits up to 50% of the community leader interviews by license renewal applicants to be conducted by non-management personnel, film and television production crews doing on-location production might contribute to a station's ascertainment effort. With adequate preparation and advance interview scheduling, production crew members could easily complete as many as ten face-to-face interviews during a one-day period in communities located nearby or enroute to/from the production site. Utilizing crew members in this fashion serves the dual purpose of reducing the manager's ascertainment burden and promoting the station's image by briefing community leaders on programs being produced in their own community or geographical region. It also has the obvious benefit of bringing lower level station personnel in direct touch with important community problems and local contacts who might contribute to the future treatment of those problems.

9. An important question not totally answered by this study concerns the extent to which community problems should be included in a station's "Problems-Programs List" on the basis of considerations other than frequency of mention and/or repeatedly high rankings by leaders. Using a community problem checklist minimizes the frustration associated with attempting to summarize a wide range

of open-ended responses which contain both specific issues and broad problem areas. By making a simple frequency count of problem topics for selected communities within a station's service area, the manager can either pool the data into a single composite listing, or draw conclusions on the basis of the different sized communities within the sample. Yet, the collapsing of information required by such procedures necessarily excludes the less frequently identified problems in the sample. Here the broadcaster is forced to make certain subjective judgments about the possible importance of problems which appear, from a strictly quantitative standpoint, to be of little significance. Only through a thorough understanding of the different communities within the broadcast service area can management make intelligent decisions regarding the most important community problems.

10. While it is true that community leaders typically represent a range of vested interests which have a definite impact on leaders' interpretations of community problems, the required survey of these leaders appears justified. The ascertainment of community leaders does result in a more meaningful understanding of the problems which exist throughout a public television station's coverage area. Meeting the ascertainment obligation should do more than help a broadcaster qualify for a three-year license renewal.

APPENDIX I

COMMUNITY PROBLEM CHECKLIST FORM A: FACE TO FACE

Additional Comments

Leader Contact Form

Date: _____

Name & Address of person contacted: _____

_____

Organization represented by person contacted: _____

_____

Checklist category represented: _____

_____

Interviewee's position in organization: _____

_____

Date, time, place of contact: _____

_____

Interviewer Name _____ Face-to-face[ ]

Telephone [ ]

Community Problem Checklist Form A

Instructions: Select the 5 (five) areas you consider to be the most important problems in your community. Rank the problems selected in order of greatest importance, marking the most pressing problem number 1 and the fifth most important problem number 5. Suggested issues, which might be associated with the general problem areas, are presented to help in the identification of community problems.

Crime (increase in burglaries, shoplifting)	
Economic Issues (inflation, taxes, fixed income)	
Education and Culture (better schools, performing arts, libraries)	
Employment (more jobs for adults, young people)	
Environmental (ecology, energy, pollution, flood control)	
Government and Politics (corruption, bigness, need for citizen action)	
Health and Medical Care (cost of services, limited facilities)	
Housing (few low income homes, problem landlords)	
Law Enforcement (more assistance for police and courts)	
Legal Protection (legal aid, consumer assistance)	
Needs of Women & Minorities (discrimination, equal opportunity)	
Planning and Zoning (more recreation areas, residential protection)	
Population Growth (need for population planning, urban sprawl)	
Religious and Moral Values (qualities, attitudes, etc.)	
Transportation (congestion, rapid mass transit)	
Other	

Openended Expansion on 5 Problem Areas

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

13

Additional Comments

APPENDIX II

COMMUNITY PROBLEM CHECKLIST FORM B: TELEPHONE

Leader Contact Form

Date: _____

Name & Address of person contacted: _____

_____

Organization represented by person: _____

_____

Checklist category represented: _____

_____

Interviewee's position in organization: _____

_____

Date, time, place of contact: _____

_____

Interviewer Name _____ Face-to face [ ]

Telephone [ ]

Community Problem Check List Form B

Instructions: Hello, I'm... I am going to read you a list of fifteen potential problem areas. For each problem, I'd like you to rank on a scale of one to seven the degree of concern this problem is to you in your community. To mark a 1 indicates a problem of little concern. To mark a 7 indicates a problem of great concern. To mark midway would indicate that the problem is of moderate concern to you in your community. For example, for a farmer with no irrigation, lack of rainfall would be a problem of great concern. Hence he would rate it 7. If he had irrigation equipment, the problem may be of moderate concern, and he would mark 4. Please feel free to use the entire range of numbers from 1 to 7.

	Little Great
Crime (increase in burglaries, shoplifting)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Economical Issues (inflation, taxes, fixed income)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Education and Culture (better schools, performing arts, libraries)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Employment (more jobs for adults, young people)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Environmental (ecology, energy, pollution, flood control)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Government and Politics (corruption, bigness, need for citizen action)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Health and Medical Care (cost of services, limited facilities)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Housing (few low income houses, problem landlords)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Law Enforcement (more assistance for police and courts)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Legal Protection (legal aid, consumer assistance)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Needs of Women and Minorities (discrimination, equal opportunities)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Planning, Zoning (more recreation areas, residential protection)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Population Growth (need for population planning, urban sprawl)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Religious and Moral Values (quality, attitudes, etc.)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Transportation (congestion, rapid mass transit)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Other	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Openended Expansion on 5 Problem Areas

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)